

Message Text

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ACTION LAB-04

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NSAE-00 /029 W

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R 271434Z JUL 76

FM AMEMBASSY PARIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3343

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY OSLO

AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM

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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 PARIS 21781

DEPT PASS DOL ATTENTION ILAB

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PLAB, FR

SUBJECT: DEPARTMENT OF LABOR REQUEST FOR INFORMATION
ON MILITARY UNIONS

REF: STATE 163207

1. SUMMARY: IN REPLY TO REFTEL IT IS THE POLICY OF
GOF FULLY SUPPORTED BY PUBLIC OPINION TO OPPOSE
ESTABLISHMENT OF MILITARY UNIONS IN THE ARMED FORCES.
CLANDESTINE ORGANIZING ACTIVITIES LAST NOVEMBER LED
TO ARRESTS OF 47 ACCUSED OF DEMORALIZING THE ARMED
FORCES. OPPOSITION PARTIES SHARE TRADITIONAL VIEW THAT
UNIONS IN THE ARMY ARE INAPPROPRIATE. ARMY REGULA-
TIONS PROVIDE A FRAMEWORK FOR PARTICIPATION IN DECISIONS
AFFECTING LIFE IN THE BARRACKS BY OFFICERS, NONCOMS
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AND PRIVATES. THIS IS MODEST ATTEMPT TO MODERNIZE

HUMAN RELATIONS. END SUMMARY.

2. NEITHER LAW NOR PUBLIC POLICY PROVIDES FOR UNIONIZATION OF OFFICERS, NONCOMS AND ENLISTED MEN IN ANY BRANCH OF THE FRENCH ARMED FORCES. ON THE CONTRARY, PUBLIC POLICY WITH OVERWHELMING SUPPORT OF PUBLIC OPINION IS OPPOSED TO SUCH ORGANIZATION AS INCOMPATIBLE WITH THE NATURE OF THE MILITARY MISSION AND ITS REQUIREMENT FOR DISCIPLINE CONSIDERED TO BE AN ESSENTIAL CONDITION TO MILITARY EFFECTIVENESS.

3. FOREGOING POLICY AND PUBLIC SENTIMENT HAD OPPORTUNITY TO REASSERT THEMSELVES SINCE NOVEMBER 1975 WHEN EXTREME LEFT-WING ELEMENTS WITH SOME SUPPORT OF LOCAL UNIONS OF THE CFDT (MILITANT SOCIALIST) CIRCULATED PETITIONS AND ATTEMPTED TO ORGANIZE CLANDESTINE SOLDIERS' COMMITTEES WITH AN ULTERIOR VIEW TO OPERATING AS A UNION. THE ARREST OF SOME FORTY-SEVEN ACTIVISTS INCLUDING A FEW ENLISTED MEN GENERATED A NATIONAL DEBATE REGARDING THE PROPRIETY OF UNIONS IN THE ARMY BUT ALSO FOCUSED ATTENTION ON THE NEED FOR RANK AND FILE PARTICIPATION IN DECISIONS CONCERNING THE QUALITY OF LIFE IN THE BARRACKS.

4. THE INCIDENT ABOVE AND THE COMMENTARY IT PRODUCED WERE REPORTED BY THE EMBASSY AND THROUGH DEFENSE ATTACHE CHANNELS. THE UPSHOT OF THE ENSUING DEBATE WAS TO CREATE PRESSURE ON THE GOVERNMENT TO RELEASE THOSE WHO HAD BEEN ARRESTED PENDING TRIAL AND AT THE SAME TIME PROVIDE AN OPPORTUNITY TO THE POLITICAL PARTIES AND UNIONS TO TAKE A POSITION ON THE MAIN ISSUE INVOLVED, NAMELY UNIONIZATION IN THE ARMED FORCES, BUT ALSO ON THE SECONDARY QUESTION WHETHER THE GOVERNMENT HAD SUFFICIENT GROUNDS ON WHICH TO BRING THE ACCUSED TO TRIAL BEFORE THE STATE SECURITY COURT.

5. TAKING FIRST THE SECONDARY ISSUE THE GOVERNMENT, IN THE ABSENCE OF A SPECIFIC PROHIBITION IN THE LAW OR REGULATIONS AGAINST ORGANIZING ACTIVITIES, RESORTED TO THE CHARGE THAT THE CLANDESTINE ORGANIZATION OF UNCLASSIFIED

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SOLDIERS' COMMITTEES REPRESENTED AN "ATTEMPT TO DEMORALIZE THE ARMED FORCES." THE OPPOSITION PARTIES AND A NUMBER OF UNION LEADERS INCLUDING THOSE OF DEMOCRATIC UNIONS COUNTERED THAT THE CHARGES AGAINST THOSE IMPLICATED IN THE INCIDENT WERE OVERDRAWN AND SHOULD BE DROPPED. THE SOCIALIST PARTY SPECIFICALLY COMMITTED ITSELF TO DEFEND THE ACCUSED IF BROUGHT TO TRIAL. IT IS INTERESTING TO NOTE THAT FOR THE LAST

THREE TO FOUR MONTHS THERE HAS BEEN NO REFERENCE MADE
TO THE NOVEMBER INCIDENT WHICH SUGGESTS PERHAPS THAT
THE GOVERNMENT'S VIEW ON THE MATTER MAY BE UNDER
RECONSIDERATION.

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6. WITH REGARD TO THE MAIN ISSUE, A NOTABLE UNANIMITY
SEEMS TO HAVE EMERGED ON THE PROPOSITION THAT UNIONS
IN THE ARMED FORCES ARE INAPPROPRIATE. THIS VIEW WAS
SHARED NOT ONLY BY THE SOCIALIST PARTY BUT ALSO BY THE
COMMUNIST PARTY. HOWEVER, BOTH OPPOSITION PARTIES
TOOK PAINS TO URGE THAT THERE BE GREATER PARTICIPATION
BY ALL ELEMENTS IN THE ARMED FORCES, NAMELY OFFICERS,
NONCOMS AND PRIVATES IN DECISIONS WHICH AFFECT OTHER
THAN MILITARY MATTERS. GOF NOT ONLY IS IN AGREEMENT

WITH THIS VIEW, BUT HAS BEEN ABLE TO POINT TO EXISTING REGULATIONS WHICH PROVIDE THE FRAMEWORK FOR WHAT THE REGULATIONS CALL HUMAN RELATIONS IN THE ARMED FORCES.

7. THE PERTINENT REGULATIONS AS FAR AS THE ARMY IS CONCERNED ARE CONTAINED IN DECREE NO. 75-680 OF UNCLASSIFIED

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30 JULY 1975 AND IMPLEMENTING DECREE OF 18 AUGUST 1975. SIMILAR REGULATIONS COVER OTHER BRANCHES OF THE ARMED FORCES. ARTICLE 70 OF THE DECREE EMPHASIZES THAT BOTH IN TIMES OF WAR AND IN PEACE ARMY UNITS MUST BE GOVERNED BY DISCIPLINE WHICH UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES CAN BE QUESTIONED. IT GOES ON, HOWEVER, TO STRESS THE FACT THAT ACCEPTANCE OF THIS DISCIPLINE DEPENDS ON HUMAN RELATIONS WHICH MUST BE "SIMPLE AND INFORMAL DURING OFF-DUTY HOURS."

8. ARTICLE 72 DEALS WITH THE QUESTION OF PARTICIPATION WHICH IS DEFINED AS THE CONDITION THROUGH WHICH DISCIPLINE CAN BE FREELY ACCEPTED INSTEAD OF BEING IMPOSED UPON OFFICERS AND ENLISTED MEN. PARTICIPATION HAS TWO MAIN OBJECTIVES: A) FOR THE UNIT COMMANDER TO GET TO KNOW BETTER HIS SUBORDINATES' POTENTIAL AND TO ASSOCIATE THE SUBORDINATES IN THE PREPARATION AND EXECUTION OF THE UNIT'S ACTIVITIES; AND B) FOR THE SUBORDINATES TO UNDERSTAND AND APPRECIATE THE REASONS BEHIND THE COMMANDER'S DECISIONS.

9. MOST IMPORTANT POINT OF ARTICLE 72 CONCERNS THE MEANS BY WHICH PARTICIPATION IS TO BE BROUGHT ABOUT. IT PROVIDES SPECIFICALLY FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEES FOR THE PURPOSE OF OBTAINING THE VIEWS OF THE INTERESTED PARTIES IN ORDER TO IMPROVE OPERATING CONDITIONS AND LIFE WITHIN THE UNIT. THE COMMITTEES ARE CHAIRED BY THE UNIT COMMANDER OR HIS REPRESENTATIVE AND ARE COMPOSED OF THE CHIEF OF THE FUNCTIONAL SERVICE (SUPPLY, KITCHEN, SPORTS) CONCERNED AND ONE OR SEVERAL OFFICERS AND PRIVATES CONSIDERED TO BE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE UNIT WITH REGARD TO THE ISSUES INVOLVED. THESE COMMITTEES MAY BE PERMANENT (COMMITTEES ON SPORTS, WELFARE, ETC.) OR OCCASIONAL DEPENDING UPON NEED.

10. WHILE THE REGULATIONS PROVIDE NOTHING WITH REGARD TO FREQUENCY WITH WHICH THE COMMITTEES MUST MEET, THEY SPECIFICALLY SPELL OUT THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE COMMITTEES TO ESTABLISH MINUTES OF MEETINGS WHICH ARE TO BE DISTRIBUTED WIDELY IN THE UNIT. (COPY OF UNCLASSIFIED

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FRENCH TEXT OF FOREGOING ARTICLES WAS MAILED TO
DOL-ILAB, ATTN: EUROPEAN AREA SPECIALIST.)

11. IT IS REPORTED BY GOF SOURCES THAT IN SOME
INSTANCES UNIT COMMANDERS HAVE NOT HESITATED TO
RESORT TO INFORMAL ELECTIONS OF REPRESENTATIVES TO THE
CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEES AS THE BEST WAY OF MEETING
THE REGULATIONS' REQUIREMENT CONCERNING REPRESENTA-
TIVITY OF SUCH MEMBERS. THESE UNDOUBTEDLY ARE
EXCEPTIONAL CASES BUT ARE PERHAPS INDICATIVE OF A
TREND WHICH MAY BE DEVELOPING REGARDING THE ENTIRE
QUESTION OF PARTICIPATION.

12. THE REGULATIONS PROVIDE ALSO FOR ANOTHER TYPE
OF REPRESENTATION LIMITED TO LIEUTENANTS AND CADETS
AND NONCOMMISSIONED OFFICERS. THE MOST SENIOR MEN IN
BOTH GROUPS ARE DESIGNATED PRESIDENTS OF THE GROUP
AND AS SUCH HAVE THE RESPONSIBILITY OF ASSISTING AND
COUNSELING THEIR PEERS. INTERESTINGLY, THE PRESIDENT
OF THE NONCOM GROUP HAS THE ADDITIONAL RESPONSIBILITY
OF PARTICIPATING IN THE UNIT'S COUNCILS OF ORIENTATION
AND REENLISTMENT OF NONCOMS AND TO ADVISE THE
COMMANDER BEFORE ANY DISCIPLINARY ACTION IS TAKEN
AGAINST A NONCOMMISSIONED OFFICER.

13. THE FOREGOING REPRESENTS MODEST
ATTEMPTS ON THE PART OF GOF TO MODERNIZE THE MILITARY

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ESTABLISHMENT WITH REGARD TO HUMAN RELATIONS AND THUS
BRING IT MORE IN LINE WITH DEVELOPMENTS IN THE ARMED
FORCES OF OTHER WESTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES. HOWEVER,
WE DO NOT EXPECT SUCH MODERNIZATION PROCESS TO GO AS
FAR AS TO LEGITIMIZE FORMALLY OR INFORMALLY THE
ORGANIZATION OF MILITARY UNIONS. THE CONVENTIONAL
VIEW OF DISCIPLINE AS A KEY ELEMENT OF THE MILITARY
ESTABLISHMENT REMAINS UNUSUALLY STRONG IN FRANCE
WITHIN OFFICIAL CIRCLES BUT ALSO WITH THE PUBLIC IN
GENERAL. AS STATED ABOVE, EVEN THE OPPOSITION PARTIES
SHARE THIS TRADITIONAL VIEW AND ARE ONLY TOO AWARE OF
THE SUPPORT IT HAS AMONG THE FRENCH PEOPLE IN ALL
WALKS OF LIFE.

14. JUDGING BY THE INDIFFERENCE, IF NOT HOSTILITY,
SHOWN BY YOUNG DRAFTEES TO THE ATTEMPTS TO ORGANIZE
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CLANDESTINE SOLDIERS' COMMITTEES, THE OBSERVER MUST
CONCLUDE THAT EVEN YOUNG DRAFTEES DO NOT LOOK TO
MILITARY UNIONS AS THE MOST APPROPRIATE AND EFFECTIVE
MEANS OF REDRESSING GRIEVANCES AND IMPROVING THE
QUALITY OF MILITARY LIFE. INFORMAL REPRESENTATIONS
SEEM TO SUCCEED IN THIS RESPECT PARTLY BECAUSE OF THE
EMPHASIS THE ARMED FORCES LEADERSHIP IS PLACING ON
HUMAN RELATIONS AND PARTLY BECAUSE OF A REDEFINITION
OF THE ROLE OF UNIT COMMANDERS BY PLACING A HERETOFORE
UNHEARD-OF IMPORTANCE ON THEIR ABILITY TO ELICIT
ACCEPTANCE AND COOPERATION FROM THE ENLISTED MEN
INSTEAD OF RELYING ON AUTOMATIC OBEDIENCE TO MILITARY
RULES AND REGULATIONS.

15. COMMENT: IN CONCLUSION ONE IS NOT LIKELY TO
SEE MILITARY UNIONS IN FRANCE IN THE FORESEEABLE
FUTURE NOTWITHSTANDING THE (OR PERHAPS BECAUSE OF)
EXAMPLE OF OTHER WEST EUROPEAN COUNTRIES AND THE
DETERMINATION SHOWN BY EXTREMIST GROUPS, INCLUDING
THOSE OPERATING WITHIN THE CFDT, TO CONTINUE TO
AGITATE IN SUPPORT OF CLANDESTINE SOLDIERS' COMMITTEES.
IN CONTRAST WE WOULD ANTICIPATE FURTHER GRADUAL EX-
PANSION OF THE RULES AND PROCEDURES CONCERNING SOLDIER
PARTICIPATION IN THE DECISIONS ON MATTERS WHICH DO NOT
QUALIFY AS STRICTLY MILITARY.
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